

Lessons of Valdez: Protect the Arctic from Global Warming, Dangerous Drilling Practices

WASHINGTON, DC – Twenty years ago today, the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound, blackening the Alaskan coast with nearly 11 million gallons of oil, killing wildlife and covering clear Pacific waters with sludge. Today, Congressional leaders identified the new threats to America's northern waters, sending a letter to President Obama asking him to protect America's Arctic region against the looming threat of global warming and ill-planned industrial activity. For the last eight years, the Bush administration pursued a reckless energy strategy in America's arctic that sought to rush oil and gas leasing while disregarding climate science and protections for iconic species like the polar bear.

US Representatives Betty McCollum (MN-4), Edward J. Markey (MA-7) and Jay Inslee (WA-1) today were joined by dozens of their colleagues calling upon the president and his administration to take several actions to protect the Arctic, which is endangered by global warming and oil and gas exploration. The letter commends the Interior Department for its plans to prepare a comprehensive offshore energy strategy, and issues the following recommendations:

- Support the strongest level of protection for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and protect vital habitats of Teshekpuk Lake, both in Alaska.
- Establish an interagency task force to develop a science-based comprehensive conservation and energy plan for the Arctic.
- Suspend the expansion of all industrial activities in the region until such a plan may be completed.

“Our country must adopt a comprehensive energy policy that is based on sound science and meets the needs of America’s economy and our ever fragile environment – including the Arctic. President Obama is committed to protecting our environment and I will be working closely with his administration to enact responsible policies to promote investments in clean energy, while preserving our environment and natural treasures for generations to come,” **said Rep.**

McCollum

“Two decades have passed since the Valdez ran aground, and we are still cleaning up that mess,” **said Rep. Markey**, who chairs key energy and climate panels in the House and this January re-introduced the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act (H.R. 39) to designate the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness with permanent protections. “Twenty years from now, we can’t look back and think ‘what should we have done to save the Arctic?’ The time to create a comprehensive plan to fight global warming and create sane energy policies is now, for the future of the Arctic and for us all.”

“The Arctic is melting, and it’s not doing so on Al Gore’s timeline -- Mother Nature is calling the shots here,” **said Rep. Inslee**. “We should pause to ensure we’re making informed decisions on the use of this land before expanding industrial activity in the area. These lands belong to all Americans, and we should make sure they’re used for the benefit of the people -- instead of the enrichment of business and industry.”

The lawmakers’ letter notes the increasing threats of global warming on the Arctic region, saying that “no place on Earth is being more rapidly or radically impacted by climate change.” The impacts on the Arctic—sea ice loss, risk to wildlife—are potentially exacerbated by development of oil and gas, both by the pollution the fuels cause, and by the potential danger from accidents like oil spills.

The full text of the letter, and a list of the 67 total signers, can be found by clicking [here](#) .